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ERTORY PLAYS N°3 671ET

THE PRICE OF COAL

HAROLD
BRIGHOUSE



Geo. Arncliffe

LONDON & GLASGOW: GOWANS & GRAY, LTD.



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REPERTORY PLAYS, No. 3

THE PRICE OF COAL

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THE PRICE OF COAL

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

GOWANS & GRAY, LTD.

5 ROBERT STREET, ADELPHI, LONDON, W.C.

58 CADOGAN STREET, GLASGOW

1911



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FOREWORD: BY THE DIRECTOR OF
THE SCOTTISH REPERTORY THEATRE

"THE PRICE OF COAL" came from a Manchester author; it was in Lancashire dialect, but was freely translated into that of Lanarkshire, before its first production on Monday, November 15th, 1909. The whole week was foggy, dense, yellow and stinking, but the audience (whose scantiness, thanks to the fog, was unregarded by the players), enthusiastic outside the Theatre, as they were within, bruited its excellence, and the many and urgent requests for its speedy revival were complied with.

It has been performed by the Repertory Company at Carlisle, Edinburgh and Perth, while a number of performances have been successfully given by amateurs.

A. W.

GLASGOW, *March*, 1911.

825835

[EXTRACT FROM
THE REPERTORY THEATRE PROGRAMME
November 15th, 1909]

THE PRICE OF COAL

A play in one act

By HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

<i>Mary Brown,</i>	-	Miss AGNES BARTHOLOMEW.
<i>Jack Brown,</i>	-	Mr. R. B. DRYSDALE.
<i>Ellen Brown,</i>	-	Miss ELSPETH DUDGEON.
<i>Polly Walker,</i>	-	Miss LOLA DUNCAN.

The Scene is laid in a Lanarkshire Colliery
Village.



THE PRICE OF COAL

MODERN industrialism has evolved its special types, and the Lanarkshire collier is small and wiry. He swings a pickaxe for hours on end crouched in an impossibly small space in heated atmosphere, and physique on the grand scale is unsuited to such conditions. He takes tremendous risks as part of his daily routine. His recreations are, to a fastidious taste, coarse. He works hard under ground and plays hard above ground. Constrained attitude is so much his second nature that he sits in perfect comfort on his haunches, in the pictured pose of the mild Hindoo, his back to a wall, discussing, amongst expectoration—a long row of him—, football, dogs, his last spree and his next, the police reports, women.

Altogether a most unpleasant person, this undersized, foul-mouthed, sporting hewer of coal—until you come to know him better, to discover his simplicity of soul, his directness, his matter-of-fact self-sacrifice, the unconscious heroism of his life: and to lose sight of his superficial frailties in your admiration for his finer qualities.

The womenkind of the colliers are marked by the life of the pits no less than the men. They are rough, capable housewives, dressing with more care for durability than effect, tolerant of their menfolks' weaknesses, and, above all, stamped with the pit-side stoicism apt to be mistaken for

callousness. The sudden death of their breadwinner is an everyday hazard, accepted without complaint and without concealment as part of their life. Like their husbands, they exist from hand to mouth on the brink of eternity. Thrift, when any day's work may be your last, seems a misplaced virtue. Lean fare approaches as pay day recedes, and illness, meagrely provided for by membership of a "sick" society, is tided over in the main by the unfailing generosity of neighbours whose own table suffers by the charity.

The scene represents the living room of a collier's cottage in Lanarkshire. The room has three doors, one to the right and one to the left, which lead to the sleeping rooms, and one in the centre which opens on to the village street. A fireplace with a cooking stove set in it is at the right. A holland blind is drawn down at the window, but it does not completely shut out the night, which is now dissolving into a grey, cold dawn, for the cheap German alarm clock that ticks loudly on the mantleshef marks the hour five-thirty. When the curtain rises the room is in darkness save for the glint of bluish-grey light that shows at the window. Then Mary Brown enters from the door on the right, she strikes a match and lights a lamp, when you see she is a girl of about twenty; she does not look her best, her hair has been hurriedly screwed up, her print blouse, murky with toil, has not yet been fastened, she wears a draggle-tailed skirt of sombre colour and list slippers are on her feet.

A small spirit-lamp is on the hob and a little tin kettle near by; she lights the lamp, puts the kettle

on it, then crosses to the door on the left and knocks.

MARY

Are ye up, Jock ?

JOCK

(*within*)

Aw richt, A'll be there in a meenit.

Mary takes a plain and fairly clean apron from a hook by the dresser and puts it on briskly ; she then takes a cup and saucer from the rack, putting them on the dresser, from the cupboard of which she takes a cocoa-tin and puts a spoonful of cocoa in the cup. Then she takes bread and meat from the cupboard and makes a couple of huge sandwiches. These she puts on a tin plate, and covering them with another tin plate, she ties the whole in a large red handkerchief with the ends looped for carrying. A tin can with a screw top is placed near by. Then, from the door at the left, enters Jock Brown, Mary's cousin.

He is dressed in his working or "black" clothes, which may have been coloured once but are now blackened with coal dust. He wears no collar, but a muffler, which, because it is doffed in the pit, still preserves something of its original hue, which was a bright red.

JOCK

A wis hardly expectin' tae see you this mornin',
Mary.

MARY

*(apparently unmoved, proceeds with her operations
at the stove)*

An' why no', bless ye. Mebbe ye'd raither A
dragged yer mither oot o' her bed an' her
bad wi' her rheumatics, tae.

JOCK

A could a' dune fur masel' for wan mornin'.

MARY

Ye'd a' made a bonnie mess o' the job.

JOCK

Aw, A'm no' a wean.

MARY

A can jist see ye daein't, an' gettin' doon tae the
pit ahint time, tae. We huvnae quarrell't,
huv we ?

JOCK

Naw : no' that A ken.

MARY

Then whit wey should A no' get up and dae fur
ye jist the same as A've dune near's lang's A
can mind ?

JOCK

A donno.

MARY

Naw, nor naebody else either.

JOCK (*disconcerted and apologetic*)

Weel, ye see, A thocht mebbe that efter whit we were sayin' last nicht ye widnae want tae see me this mornin'.

MARY

Naw, there wis naethin' in that tae pit us aff the usual.

JOCK (*with eagerness*)

Then, wull ye tell me——

MARY

(*cutting him short and putting the cocoa on the table*)

There's yer cocoa. Ye'll better drink it when it's hot.

JOCK (*tasting*)

Aye. It's hot anough onyway.

MARY

It's a cauld mornin' tae be gaun oot. Ye'll be nane the waur o' somethin' hot this weather.

JOCK

Aye. A dare say it's cauld anough, bit the weather can wait. A've got somethin' else tae talk tae ye aboot besides the weather.

MARY

Mebbe ye huv, ma boy, but ye'll huv tae wait till the richt time comes,

JOCK

Mary, lassie, will A huv tae wait till the nicht fur
ma answer ?

MARY

Play fair noo, Jock. Ye gien me a day frae last
nicht tae think about it.

JOCK

A ken A did. That's richt enough. Only it's no'
sae easy tae wait as A thocht it wis when it
comes tae daein't.

MARY

Mebbe no'. But ye'll jist huv tae pit up wi't. It
wis you that said wait. A never mentioned
it.

JOCK

Ye shouldnae be sae hard on a chap, Mary. A'm
wantin' ye that bad. A'm on needles and
peens till A ken whit road the cat'll jump.
Ye never ken, Mary, what'll happen doon a
pit. Jist think. A micht never come up
again and ye'd be sick and sorry if A wis
blown tae kingdom come an' no' huv the
consolation o' kennin' that ye meant tae huv
me.

MARY

It's nae use, ma boy. Ye'll no' frichten me that
wey. A'm no' pit born like you, but A've

stayed aside pits a bit ower lang fur that. An' ye ken weel anough it's no' richt tae talk aboot they things. A tell't ye A'd gie ye yer answer the nicht an' ye'll huv tae wait till the nicht fur it. A'm no' gaun back on ma word.

JOCK

Bit if ye ken whit ye're gaun tae say whit wey wull ye no' say it noo and pit me oot o' misery ?

MARY

Aye, an' huv ye gaun aboot tellin' everybody that aw ye hud tae dae wis whistle an' A rushed intae yer airms. Naw, ma boy, A'm a single wumman yit and A'm no promised tae nae man. A'll tak' ma ain time tae tell ye whether A'm gaun tae chinge ma name or no'. (*Breaking off and looking at the clock.*) It's time ye were flittin'. Ye'll be late if ye don't hurry up.

JOCK

A don't care if A am.

MARY

Aw, but ye dae. Don't be a silly. Ye ken ye've never missed bein' in the first cage doon since ye startet workin' an' A 'll no' hae folk saying ye startet missin' it ower me. Hae ye finished yer cocoa ?

JOCK

Aye. Ye're terrible hard on a chap, Mary.

MARY

Awa' wi ye. If ye hud a' been as keen on mairryin' me as ye think ye are, ye wud mebbe huv plucked up courage tae ask me shuner.

JOCK

A only waitet till ma mind wis med up fur sure.
A wisnae long o' askin' ye whin it wis.

MARY

Then ye'll jist hae tae wait till mine is med up.
Whit's sauce fur the goose is sauce fur the gander, ye ken.

JOCK

Ye couldnae gie me sae much's a hint? Only
a lick an' a promise like?

MARY

Naw, A'm no' makin' no promises till A'm ready.
Ye're only wastin' yer time, man, an riskin'
bein' late tae.

JOCK

Aw, weel, if A huv tae wait, A'll jist huv tae.

MARY

It'll be stoppin' time afore ye know it.

JOCK

(he goes towards the door, lifting his cap from a peg on the way)

Oh aye. It's easy talkin'. Ye're only keepin' me in suspense, ye teasin' buddy. Its mebbe fun to you, but there's no' much fun tae me wi' you cairryin' on like that.

MARY

Ye'll be late for yer work. That'll be the end o't.

JOCK

Aw richt. *(He puts his cap on.)* A'm gaun. Whaur's ma piece?

MARY

Here ye are.

[She hands him the handkerchief of food and the can, which he slings over his shoulder by a short strap.]

JOCK

Huv ye tied it up weel?

MARY

Aye. Why?

JOCK

Rats wur busy at it yesterday whin A cam' to pit my pick doon an look fur ma dinner. Bit ye cannae help rats in a pit an mebbe they're as hungry as A am.

MARY

Weel, its tied as ticht as A can mak' it. Noo
look sherp or ye'll be late. Ye're forgettin'
yer lamp. Dear kens whit a fix ye'd be in
if A wisnae up tae look efter ye.

JOCK

It's wi' thinkin' o' you, lass.

[He takes up his lamp.]

MARY

'Time enough fur that when yer work's dune.

JOCK

*(as he opens the door slowly, morn has broken fully, and
a hard grey light enters the room)*

A'll be hame pretty quick so ye'll better be
ready.

MARY

A'll be ready richt enough.

JOCK

A' richt. Then we'll leave it at that.

MARY

Aye.

*[Jock goes out, closing the door quietly after
him. Mary, left alone, begins to tidy up]*

and prepare the house for the use of the day. Soon the door at the right opens, and Ellen Brown, Jock's mother, enters. She is an old woman, but not so old as she looks; her spare figure bears all the marks of a life that is one continuous struggle against a hard fate. She is dressed plainly in black, with an apron; her head is covered with a shawl. Mary, who is at the window rolling up the broken blind, starts and turns to her in surprise.

MARY

Why, auntie, ye're up airly.

ELLEN

Aye. Is the lad awa' yit?

MARY

He's jist awa'. Is onythin' wrang?

ELLEN

Naw, lass, naw. A wid a' liket to a' seen him afore he went.

MARY

Will A rin efter im? He's jist this meenit awa'.

ELLEN

An' mak' 'im late? Naw, we musnae dae that. It wis only a fancy. A thocht A micht catch 'im, but A widnae chance makin' 'im

late. He tak's a pride in bein' at the pit-head regular for the first cage gaun doon; he'd be rare an' mad wi' me if A brung him back fur naethin'.

MARY

Why did ye no' shout on us frae yer room?

ELLEN

A didnae think o' that.

MARY

(puzzled by her appearance, decides to be consoling)
Weel, A'm sorry ye left yer bed fur naethin',
before the room's aired tae.

ELLEN

Ach, that's naethin', lass.

MARY

Weel, sit doon while A mak' a fire an get the
breakfast ready. Room'll soon be warm.

ELLEN

Aye, lass.

[She moves listlessly to the rocking-chair, in which she sits passively, while Mary takes some sticks and paper from the oven and kneels, making a fire.]

MARY

It's a wee sherp this mornin' too. *(She looks up to see Ellen furtively dabbing her eyes with a*

clean handkerchief.) Auntie, whit's up wi' ye?
Wull ye no tell me whit's the maitter?

ELLEN

Naethin', lass, naethin'.

MARY

(as she rises and stands by the chair)

Bit there must be somethin'. Whit wey did
ye get up sae airly? Ye were soon' anough
asleep when A left ye.

ELLEN

Sleepin'? Aye, A wis sleepin' richt anough, an'
would to God A hidnae been.

MARY

Whit dae ye mean?

ELLEN

Only an auld wife's fancy, lass.

MARY

Naw, ye must tell me whit it is.

ELLEN

It wis a dream that made me rise, lass.

MARY

A dream?

ELLEN

Aye. A dream't A wis gaun in a field an' the
grass wis green, greener than life, an' there

wis coos in it and sheep—no' dirty, blackened beasts like whit's here, bit whit ye wid fancy they wid be some place whaur there isnae always smoke. An' A walked in the field an' the sun wis shinin' an' it cam' dark suddent an' A couldnae see the coos nae mair. There wis thunder an' it frichtened me an' whin A cam' tae look up again, it wis rainin' bluid on ma heid, naethin' bit bluid, an' the field ran rid wi' it. Bluid everywhaur, naethin' bit bluid.

MARY

An' it frichtened ye? Aye, the nightmare's no pleasant fur ony yin. Ye ett pretty hearty last nicht. Weel, never mind. It's a' past noo. Ye'll feel better efter a cup o' tea. A'll shune huv breakfast on the table noo.

ELLEN

A've dream't yon dream afore, an' the last time A dream't it wis the nicht afore the big fire in the pit whin Jock's faither got 'imself kill't. A've niver dream't it since that nicht an' noo it's come again an' ma boy's gaun oot tae his work an' me too late to stop 'im.

MARY

(moves towards the door)

Mebbe it's no' too late.

ELLEN

Come back, lass. Look at the clock. The first cage 'ull be gaun doon lang afore ye could

get there and oor Jock'll be in't. He's aye in the first cage, is oor Jock. Best time-keeper on the pit.

MARY

Oh, why did ye no' tell me at first? He'll be kill't; he'll be kill't.

ELLEN

It's nae use worryin' like that. Jock's in God's hand, lass, same as he is every day whether A dream or no'. An' mebbe there's naethin' to worry ower. They do say that there's naethin' in dreams. A doot it's gaun against the Almighty tae tak' notice o' a dream. If He hud meanted it fur a warnin' He'd likely have sent it shuner so as A could a' kept Jock frae gaun oot. Aye, he's in God's keepin'. We can dae naethin'. Get the kettle filled.

MARY

Yes, Auntie.

ELLEN

A'll see tae the table.

MARY

Aw richt.

ELLEN

(as she takes a coarse white cloth from a drawer, spreads it and proceeds to lay breakfast.)

Ye'll hardly mind an accident here will ye, Mary?

MARY

Naw.

ELLEN

Naw, A thocht no'. (*She has now come to the fire-place, where she sits in an arm-chair.*) It's mony a year sin' we hud yin tae speak o'. A don't mind o' hearin' the alarm bell ringin' mair than yince, or mebbe twict since yer uncle wis kill't. That wis somethin' like a do. There wis mair than twinty kill't that time an' mebbe forty or mair that wis hurt. A've heard folks say there his been bigger accidents in America, but A don't tak' ower much notice o' they newspaper tales masel'. Eh, it micht a' been yesterday.

MARY

Tell me aboot it, Auntie. Ye've never tell't me hoo it happen't.

ELLEN

Eh? Bless the lass, whit's the use o' that! Seems to me we're baith o' us a bit cracket the day. We've got accident on the brain.

MARY

They ay ring the bell don't they, Auntie, when onythin' gaes wrang?

ELLEN

No' fur an odd man an' 'is laddie nipped in a roof fall, jist if it's a big thing. Look here, lass,

if ye cannae talk o' naethin' bit accidents,
ye'd better shut up. (*She rises from her chair.*)
Whit wi' ma dream an' your worryin' A don't
know where A am.

MARY

A wis jist askin'. Ye never can ken wi' a coal-pit
whin its gaun tae git nesty an' a man cannae
ay mind whaur he is whin he's doon.

ELLEN

They're watched shairper gaun doon nooadays an
the men ken better nor tae take risks theirsel's,
the way they use't tae in the auld days.

MARY

Aye, but a man that forgets yinst 'll forget yinst
too often.

ELLEN

A've tell't ye tae quit bletherin'. Folks 'ud think
ye hudnae lived aside pits mair nor a week
tae hear ye talk daft like that. There's ay
danger and naebody but a born fool wid say
there wis'nt, but it'll no' mend it tae go
thinkin' aboot it. There's coal there an' it's
got tae be got and that's the first an' last o't.
Hae ye pit tea in the pot?

MARY

Naw.

ELLEN

Ye'd better dae it then.

[Mary puts tea in the tea-pot from a canister on the mantel-shelf. As she does so, a heavy bell rings clangorously.]

MARY

Whit's that ?

ELLEN

(quietly and slowly bending her head as if to a physical blow)

God's wull be dune.

MARY

Is it——?

ELLEN

Aye. *(Then, as Mary makes for the door.)* Whaur are ye gaun, lass ?

MARY

A'm gaun tae the pit tae see whit's up.

ELLEN

Naw. Ye're no'. A'll want ye here.

MARY

Why no' ?

ELLEN

There'll be plenty fills o' wimmen there seein' whit's up and keepin' the men frae their wark, withoot you gaun an' helpin' them tae dae it.

MARY

But we——

ELLEN

Look here ma lass, if oor Jock's hurt, oor job's tae get 'im weel again. Rushin' oot tae the pitheid 'll dae 'im nae guid. It's only wimmen that huvnae got husbands and sons doon in the pit that gaes staunin' roon faintin' and whit nut an' makin' a nuisance o' theirsels. The ithers stays at hame an' gets things ready.

MARY

We dinnae ken whit tae get ready fur.

ELLEN

We ken anough.

MARY

Jock 'll mebbe no' be hurt.

ELLEN

Then we'll hae wastet oor wark.

MARY

Whit'll A dae ?

ELLEN

A donno that there's sae much when aw's dune.
We'll mebbe need hot watter.

MARY

Fur——

ELLEN

Hoo dae A ken whit fur? Yon kettleful 'll dae
an' oor tea will huv tae wait.

MARY

Bit whit can we dae? Gie me somethin' tae dae
fur mercy's sake. A'll go mad if A don't dae
somethin'. A cannae sit still and wait, and
wait, and wait.

ELLEN

Ye'd best be makin' his bed.

MARY

Yes, auntie.

ELLEN

Whit are ye greetin' fur, lass? We ken naethin'
yit, an' if we did, greetin' 'll no' mend it. It'll
dae Jock nae guid, nae maitter hoo he is, to
see ye slobberin' whin he comes in. (*Mary
dries her eyes and begins to clear the table.*)
Whit are ye daein' that fur?

MARY

A don't know. A thocht——

ELLEN

A body mun eat. Let things be. A tell't ye tae
gang tae the room and mak' his bed.

MARY

Aw richt, auntie.

[Mary goes to the bedroom, closing the door behind her. Ellen looks to see it is shut, and moves rapidly and purposefully to the door to the street. It is now daylight. The confused murmur of a distant crowd is heard. She stands on the threshold and looks out. Presently she speaks to some one approaching but not yet visible.]

ELLEN

Whit is't, Polly ?

[A middle-aged woman in a drab skirt and blouse with a shawl thrown over her head appears breathless at the door ; it is a neighbour, Polly Walker.]

POLLY

Ropes slipped and the cage fell doon the shaft.
Is your's oot at his wark.

ELLEN

First cage doon ?

POLLY

Aye.

ELLEN

Mine's is in't.

POLLY

We'll shune ken the warst. They wis riggin'
tackle whin A come away. They'll huv them
up in nae time.

ELLEN

A'll be ready. Whaur's yours?

POLLY (*who has come into the room*)

Mine's aw richt—safe in their beds—sleepin' aff last
nicht's drink, thank the Lord.

ELLEN

They must bring him here, Polly, nae maitter
whit he's like.

POLLY

Aye. A body likes tae dae fur her ain. Whaur's
the lass? Awa' tae the pit?

ELLEN

Makin' his bed in case its needet.

POLLY

That's richt. Don't let her oot.

ELLEN

No' if A can help it. She wantet tae go, but A
widnae huv it. Ye'll see things at a pit-heid
efter an accident that's no fit fur a young yin.
Waste her life fur her to be there whin
they're brung up.

POLLY

Aye. A'm no' gaun back. A've seen anough,
never nae mair if A can help it.

ELLEN

Come in, wull ye ?

POLLY

Aye. A'd best shut the door, tae, an' keep oot
the row or she'll be wantin' tae go.

*[She closes the door and takes a chair at the
table.]*

ELLEN

Aye. They cannae sit quiet when they're young.

POLLY

That's a fact. A mind the day when the pit wis
on fire. A wis only a wee lassie then, bit ma
mither had nae mair sense nor tae let me
oot tae the pit-heid tae see the bodies brung
up. A'll never forget that sicht. A dream
about it tae this day.

ELLEN

Sit doon, Polly. A bit o' comp'ny comes handy
at a time like this.

POLLY (*sitting*)

Thenk ye.

ELLEN

Aye. It's a thing ye cannae forget. Seems as if it wis only the ither day A heard the bell ringin' an' saw ma man bring up. He wis that charred A only kent him by the earrin's he wore because his eyes wis weak. They tell't me efter that a rabbit had crossed his road on the wey tae the pit, but he always wis obstinate, wis ma Joe an' he widnae tak' warnin' and noo the cage has slipped wi' ma son in her and A'll hae nae menfolk noo.

[The door from the bedroom has been opening slowly, and Mary listens. The others do not see her.]

POLLY

Ye never ken. Mebbe he'll no' be kill't.

ELLEN

A dream't the same dream last nicht as when his faither went.

POLLY

In the midst o' life we are in death. There's no' a truer word nor that.

ELLEN

No' when ye live aff coal. There's wimmen keepin' hoose in the places the coal goes that pay fur their coal wi' brass. We pay a sicht heavier fur it here. We pay wi' the lives o' men.

POLLY

But it's a comfort tae think he'll no' be burnt. A
cannae staun' a corp that's burnt.

ELLEN

Aye, better broken than burnt.

POLLY

An' ye'll huv money in the funeral Society.

ELLEN

Oh, aye. A can gie him a decent burial.

POLLY

That's ay a comfort. Ye don't seem tae care
sae much some wey, when ye ken he's hud a
decent burial. He's bin a guid son tae ye,
tae.

ELLEN

Oh aye, he's a good lad. He's mebbe had his
shillin' on a horse noo and then an' whiles
gone rattin' on a Sunday mornin', but that's
only tae say he's a man an' no' an angel in
brecks.

POLLY

It's mair than A can say about ma lot. Lazy,
drunken, good-for-nothings they are, faither
an' sons tae. Come tae mention't, it's a funny
thing. Providence works in its ain way. If
mine hadnae been on the spree last nicht,
they'd as like as no huv been in the cage
alang wi your boy.

MARY (*comes forward into the room*)

A'll awa' tae the pit noo, auntie.

ELLEN

Tak' yer hurry, lass.

MARY

A cannae wait, A must ken.

ELLEN

Sit doon.

MARY

A cannae sit doon an' listen tae you twa talkin' that way. First ye've got 'im kill't an' then ye bury 'im, an' next ye'll be argying whit's tae go on his grave-stane an' aw the time ye don't sae much as ken if he's hurt.

POLLY

Sit still, lassie. Ye'd better wait.

MARY

Oh, A don't know whit ye're made o'—you twa. Ye sit there quiet an' calm as if there wis naethin' the maitter.

ELLEN

We're auld enough tae ken we cannae dae nae guid. Hae ye made the bed?

MARY

Aye.

ELLEN

Weel, there's a bottle o' brandy in the room-press.
We micht need it.

MARY

A'll get it. [*Mary goes to the bedroom again.*]

POLLY

She's gettin' restless.

ELLEN

Aye. It's harder when ye're young tae haud yersel' in. It disnae come natural tae her, no' bein' born tae pits like us. Her mither mairret a weaver chap in Dundee an' brought her up tae mills. It tak's mair than a year or twa tae git intae the wey o' pits when ye're born strange tae them.

POLLY

Aye. We're used tae the thocht o' losin' oor men suddent.

ELLEN

But she'll no gae tae the pit-heid if A can stop her. We'll hae tae keep her mind aff it.
Can ye mind o' onything else we micht want?

POLLY

Naw, naethin'.

ELLEN

We micht need linen fur tyin' up.

POLLY

Naw, ye'll no'. The doctors were there afore A come away, and ambulance men tae wi' aw they'll need. But we'll huv tae keep her here whether she likes it or no'.

ELLEN

Aye. (*She looks towards the street-door. Polly catches her meaning.*) Wull ye? A don't move sae easy as A used.

POLLY

The door?

ELLEN

Aye.

POLLY

Aye. That's richt. (*She goes to the street-door.*) Better let her think we're ill usin' her than let her oot tae see them sights.

[*She turns the key and gives it to Ellen as she resumes her seat.*]

ELLEN

Thenk ye, Polly. (*She pockets the key.*) Help me tae mak' talk noo and keep her mind aff it.

MARY (*enters with a bottle*)

There's the brandy.

ELLEN

That's richt. (*A slight pause; the older women try to make conversation. First Polly bobs forward*

as if about to speak, but leans back without saying anything; Ellen does the same. Mary moves to the door as Ellen, glancing round for a subject, lets her eye fall on the brandy bottle and fires off her remark in time to arrest Mary's progress towards the door.) A thocht there wis mair nor that in the bottle, aw the same.

POLLY

It's a handy thing tae huv about the hoose.

ELLEN

Aye. Rare stuff fur the jaw-ache.

POLLY

It is that. Goes weel wi' a cup o' tea, tae, on a cauld mornin'.

MARY

Is there onything else?

ELLEN

Eh? Naw, A don't think there is, Mary. Let me think. Naw. That's aw A can mind.

MARY

A'll awa', thin.

ELLEN

Naw, ye'll no'.

MARY

Why no'?

ELLEN

Because ye'll no'. Ye'll stay whaur ye are.

MARY

Let me go. A must go. A cannae stay here.

POLLY

Dae whit yer auntie tells ye, lassie. Young folks is that smert nooadays, there's nae use tellin' them onythin'.

MARY

Oh, ye don't understand. A must go. A must.
(*She goes to the door; tries to open it.*) Door's locked. This door's locked. Whaur's the key? Whit huv ye dune wi' the key?

ELLEN

Look here, lass, A tell't ye ye widnae go, an' A've made sure o't. Come noo. Come an' sit quiet, ravin' aboot as if ye were mad. Ye'll huv the haunel aff the door.

MARY

Let me go tae him.

ELLEN

No.

MARY

A must go. A must. A love him. A love him.

ELLEN

D'ye think A don't love him, lassie? Aye and a sicht better than a bit wean like you could love him. A'm his mither.

MARY

Oh, huv mercy. Ye don't know. A sent 'im oot. He wisnae for gaun till A'd said the word. A widnae tell 'im. A made him wait till the nicht. A sent him tae his death.

ELLEN

The lassie's ravin'.

MARY

Let me go.

ELLEN

No.

MARY

Ye won't?

POLLY

Haud yer wheish, lass. It's fur yer ain guid.

MARY

Why huv ye locked thon door? Ye're cheatin' me. Ye're cruel. A can dae nae guid here. Let me go tae 'im. A must go. A wull.

[The two women have now faced each other; there is a violent knocking at the door.]

MARY

Whit's that ? Oh, ma God, whit's that ?

[Ellen takes the key from her pocket, moves slowly to the door, unlocks it, and throws it open. Jock stands on the threshold, very pale, with his coat buttoned at the bottom, and only his right arm thrust into the sleeve.]

ELLEN

Ma boy !

[She tries to embrace him.]

JOCK

Steady, mither. Watch ma airm.

ELLEN

Is it broken ?

JOCK

Aye, the doctor'll be roon' tae set it shune.
They've anough tae dae first, though. There's
plenty worse nor me.

ELLEN

Thank God !

JOCK

Naw, mither. It's aw by. There's naethin' tae
greet fur, and no' sae much in a broken airm
tae thank God fur, neither.

MARY

Oh, Jock !

JOCK

Is that aw ye've got tae say tae me? The shift's ower, ma lass. Mebbe it's ower afore it startet, but that disnae maitter. A've come fur ma answer, Mary.

MARY

Ye're an old fraud. Ye kent aw the time. Oh, Jock, Jock, A thocht ye wis kill't.

JOCK

Ye thocht wrang. A'm no the deein' kin'. So ye'll huv me?

MARY

Aye.

JOCK

A'll awa roon' an' see the meenister aboot pittin' up the banns when ma airm's set. A'll be huvin' some time on ma hauns. A think gettin' mairrit 'll fill in the time beautiful.

CURTAIN

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